

A Guide to Writing Letters-to-the-Editor on Native Boarding Schools

Why write a letter-to-the-editor?

Letters-to-the-editor (LTEs) can be a surprisingly potent tool for advocates. Congressional offices review local media outlets in their district on a very consistent basis to see what matters to their constituents. If you name your lawmakers in your LTE, their office will often receive an alert. This means your LTE will very likely be read by someone in your congressional office!

Why write on Native boarding schools?

In the 19th and 20th centuries, Christian churches—including Quakers—collaborated with the government to create hundreds of boarding schools for Native children. Students were stripped of their culture, subjected to extensive abuse, and forced to assimilate into white, Christian society.

In Sept. 2021, the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies in the U.S. Act (H.R. 5444/S. 2907) was introduced in Congress. If passed, the legislation would establish the first formal commission in U.S. history to investigate the human rights violations that were committed and make recommendations for further government action.

By writing letters-to-the-editor that call on your lawmakers to support this bill, you can build vital support and awareness for this long-neglected issue. The bill could be voted on in the House as soon as this fall, if enough members show their support. *[Learn more here.](#)*

Tips for writing

You can use FCNL's RAFT principles to guide your writing. (Remember: LTEs are generally no more than 200 words. Check your local outlet's website to see if they have any word count limits.)

R – Respond to Recent Reports

LTEs are most likely to be published if you're responding to an article. But Native boarding schools don't always get a lot of attention in the media. If there's not an article to respond to, you can write about how this legislation is currently before Congress, and could move as soon as this fall.

A – Ask for Action

Mention your members of Congress by name. Urge them to support the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies in the U.S. Act (H.R. 5444/S. 2907) and call for its swift passage.

F – Find the facts to support your argument and include them

- Page 83 of [*this report from the Bureau of Indian Affairs*](#) shows how many Native boarding schools were in each state. Check to see if any schools were in your state, and if so, include this figure in your LTE.
- Between 1819 and 1969, there were 408 schools across 37 states, and over 1,000 other institutions that involved the education of Native children, including Indian day schools, orphanages, and asylums.
- A recent investigation by the Bureau of Indian Affairs found 53 burial sites at boarding school locations.
- The federal government has a treaty and trust responsibility to protect tribal sovereignty and enhance tribal self-determination.

T – Tie it all together

Bring in your personal connection or moral approach to the issue. If your community is engaging in any reconciliation work on boarding schools, mention that.

How to submit an LTE

LTEs are usually run in the opinion section. Check the website of your local papers to see if there are any guidelines to submit your LTE. There is usually an email address listed specifically for LTEs or reader feedback.

What to do after you've submitted

Check the paper to see if they ran your LTE! If you don't see it within a few days, don't be afraid to follow up via email or phone.

If your LTE gets published, email [*media@fcnl.org*](mailto:media@fcnl.org) with a link so that we can share more broadly and flag with the appropriate congressional offices.

Questions? Email Alex at [*afrandsen@fcnl.org*](mailto:afrandsen@fcnl.org).